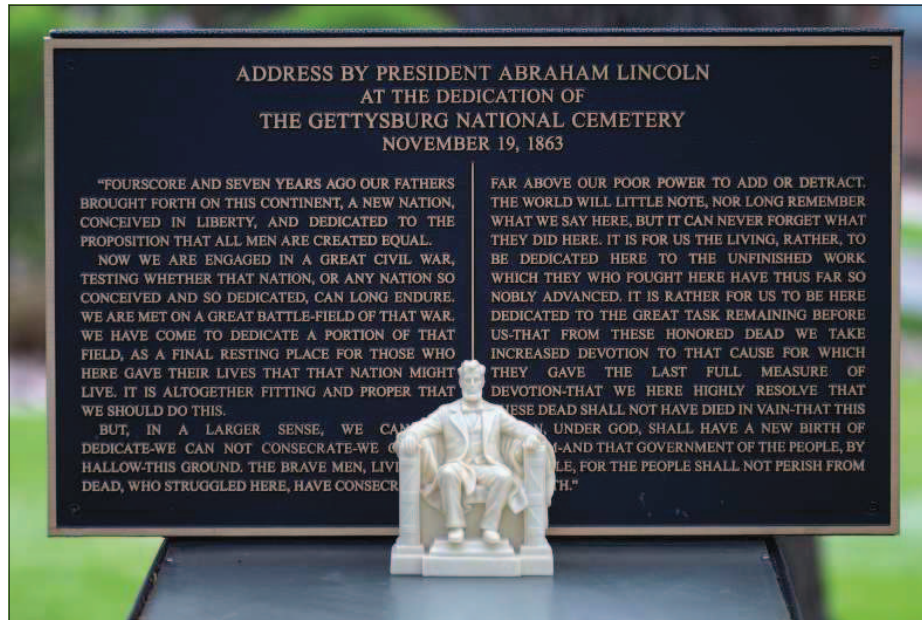


# MONUMENTAL

## Stenzel's script part of Lincoln Memorial centennial in D.C.



Photos by Jackson Forreder, special to The Free Press

A miniature replica of the Lincoln Memorial statue owned by Bryce Stenzel sits in front of a plaque bearing the Gettysburg Address at Lincoln Park in Mankato.

## Local Lincoln devotee dives into the memorial's history



Bryce Stenzel, dressed as Abraham Lincoln, stands near Mankato's Boy in Blue Monument. Stenzel wrote a script that provides information about the design and construction of the Lincoln Memorial. Excerpts will be read Monday at a Washington, D.C., event.

By Edie Schmierbach

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A local man who frequently portrays the nation's 16th president will be in Washington, D.C., today for the centennial celebration of a national monument built to honor Abraham Lincoln.

Bryce Stenzel will remain in the capital on Monday to observe the reading of excerpts from a theatrical piece related to the centennial, based on his script "Freedom's Temple: The Lincoln Memorial."

The writing project was pandemic therapy for Stenzel, who did most of his research on the Lincoln Memorial at his St. Clair home. He had been aware the monument's centennial was approaching and was considering it as a writing topic.

Sheltering in place helped that happen. "It came out of necessity. I was cooped up and needed something to keep my mind going," Stenzel said.

Two D.C.-area history organizations are helping fund Stenzel's travel expenses. The Lincoln Group Inc. of the District of Columbia and the Civil War Roundtable of the District of Columbia

Please see SCRIPT, Page B3

### More Information

What: Virtual reading of "Freedom's Temple: The Lincoln Memorial."

When: 3 p.m. Monday.

Cost: Free.

To view reading, go to: [us02web.zoom.us/j/73777333091?pwd=V05ZQm9iSDILSHcvSk4zYTJlMkZkdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/73777333091?pwd=V05ZQm9iSDILSHcvSk4zYTJlMkZkdz09).

# SCRIPT: Stenzel's pandemic project

Continued from Page B1

are co-sponsors of the virtual reading of the play.

Monday's 3 p.m. event is the first presentation of a script that provides key background information about the design and construction of the memorial, as well as its evolving meaning.

Throughout the 100 years since its dedication, the memorial has served as America's public square, where people gather to demand inclusion in that union, according to the centennial website.

Stenzel, who recently joined the Civil War Roundtable group, or CWRTPDC, said he'd not been expecting the honor of having his script become part of a national centennial event.

"Through our talks they found out I do this kind of work ... I showed it to them and now here we are."

"Freedom's Temple: The Lincoln Memorial" is produced by Lincoln Group's vice president of special programs Debbie Jackson and directed by KenYatta Rogers.

The play provides behind-the-scenes insights too often unknown or overlooked.

"The script gave me an opportunity to use theater to help tell the various stories of people who lived real lives and made real



Jackson Forderer, special to The Free Press

Bryce Stenzel's watch is a replica of Abraham Lincoln's watch. This Memorial Day will be the 100th anniversary of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

choices that resulted in having a monument in the first place," Jackson said.

"Kurt DeSoto of the Civil War Round Table of D.C. brought the script to my attention and was instrumental in shaping it to tell the stories. I knew that KenYatta Rogers — a renowned actor, director and now theater professor — would be masterful in presenting the material in an effective, entertaining and enlightening manner, so we're thrilled he's part of the project.

"Rogers is also keen on bringing an inclusive and African American sensibility to the project. Already, he's planning to use a diverse set of actors, some seasoned, some students that will bring a vitality to the words and messages."

"I love the title of the play 'Freedom's Temple,'" Rogers said, adding that the memorial symbolizes everyone's right to be fully recognized and seen.

The use of Zoom as an instrument of creation worked well for cross-country communications with Stenzel, he said.

Rogers, who is a college professor as well as an actor/director, has enlisted a mixture of young students and seasoned actors for Monday's virtual reading.

The cast will read with

editorial assistance from Jackson and CWRTPDC president DeSoto.

In keeping with the play's theme of diversity, Rogers' cast of actors are not monochromatic nor monogender.

Rogers said the memorial has been used as a source of inspiration and aspiration that allows us to see "the American dream is possible if we course correct."

Key characters include the designers and builders, as well as contralto Marian Anderson, a Black woman who sang outdoors at the memorial to an audience of 75,000 on April 9, 1939. The location for her performance was chosen after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to host Anderson in its Constitution Hall.

Another actor will portray Robert Moton, the sole African American speaker at the dedication that took place during the Jim Crow era of legalized segregation. The remarks Moton prepared were censured as "too radical" by the dedication's organizers.

Jackson said she's excited to see the monthslong collaboration with Rogers and Stenzel wrapping up and coming to fruition.

"We came in with different perspectives and worked together to see



Debbie Jackson



KenYatta Rogers

what can be done to get across the meaning."

The memorial and its evolving history and meaning made for a good script. The man it memorializes also is a good topic, Stenzel said.

"Lincoln was the first president to be assassinated; that created a lot of emotion in the country."

At first, the memorial was emphasized as tribute to Lincoln as the preserver of the Union. Its promoters downplayed the president's role in freeing slaves.

There are no immediate plans for other presentations of the work. But curious area residents may visit with Stenzel about his script on May 30, which is not only Memorial Day 2022 but the actual centennial date for the Lincoln Memorial.

Stenzel will participate in Memorial Day ceremonies at the Boy in Blue Monument, Mankato's memorial to area Civil War veterans. He's active in area historical societies and reenactors groups. There's a good chance he'll be seen at a local event dressed up as Abraham Lincoln.

Stenzel does not see himself as an Abraham Lincoln double.

"He was 6' 4", I am 6'2"... and he was gaunt," Stenzel said.

"I've been interested in Lincoln since I was a little boy. I was impressed by his honesty, fairness and compassion ... and that he came from a humble background.

"He is the epitome of the American dream."